



Māori and problem gambling in NZ

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Pre-colonial Māori society had no history of gambling, drinking alcohol or smoking tobacco. Early post-colonial gambling related activities were generally positive experiences. They incorporated social interaction with whānau with outcomes which were usually beneficial for their marae, church or community. Fundraising activities such as housie and card games were seen as ways to help maintain the marae as a legacy to their parents and also ensure the continuity of their turangawaewae for their mokopuna.¹

The expansion of gambling and the shift to urban life has meant that many Māori are now living where the dominant culture is non-Māori. No longer in a safe environment in which to socialise gambling became problematic.

In the 2006 census the total Māori population in New Zealand numbered 565,329, or 14% of the total population (a 7.4% increase since the 2001 census). One in seven people identified as Māori.²

The 1991 and 1999 New Zealand national gambling prevalence studies reported that Māori were two to three times more at risk of problem and pathological gambling than non-Māori. They also reported that 16% of the Māori adult population had had a problem with gambling.³

The ripple effect from this is that five people (generally whanau or significant other) can be affected by each problem gambler which suggests that up to 239,000 people could be potentially adversely affected by Māori problem gambling.³

It has been reported that Māori spend almost twice as much on gambling as non-Māori, they spend approximately NZ\$686 per year compared to NZ\$376 per year.³ This is highly significant as the Māori median income is half that of non Māori.⁴

Māori men and women seek help for gambling related problems on average ten years earlier than non-Māori, which could be the result of earlier exposure and normalising of gambling in Māori communities.⁵ Māori youth (20% of the Māori population) are six times more likely to develop gambling problems than non Māori youths.⁵

There is a growing concern over advertising and the use of Māori cultural icons being used to promote and normalise gambling.

Advertisements such as for those for Lotto uses messages which suggest that gambling is the means of achieving ones dreams and promote luck as the way to determine your future.⁵

It is important that Māori community, cultural, sport and marae development should not be dependent on gambling funding.⁵

Why Māori gamble⁶

Reasons for starting gambling were:

- Getting involved in fundraising (69%)
- Advertisements encouraged me to think I'd win (80%)
- Dealing with stress and troubles (87%)
- Needing money to fulfil obligations (54%)
- Gambling a social activity (95%)
- Gambling is one of the few entertainment options (92%)
- I hoped to win big money (100%)
- Friends and family introduced me to gambling (83%)

Reasons for continuing gambling were:

- I have easy access to money machines (94%)
- Small wins encourage me to keep gambling (98%)
- I have easy access to gambling activities (98%)
- Escape from stress and troubles (96%)
- I have a lot of free time (94%)

Statistics from 2007 Problem Gambling Intervention Services in NZ⁷

Gambling Helpline Ltd Services

- Māori were overrepresented.
- 29.6% new gambler clients were Māori.
- 14.5% of significant other clients phoning helpline were Māori.

Face to face counselling services

- One third or 28.6% new clients seeking help were Māori.

- 34.2% of significant other new clients attending counselling are Māori.
- Pokies were the primary mode of problem gambling for new clients. 8 out of ten (81.2%) of female Maori gamblers cited pokies for their gambling problem.
- Maori lost \$1,498 on average in four weeks prior to seeking help.
- Māori women new clients are the second largest group after Pakeha men.

Ministry of Health client data showed that the number of Maori clients had risen to 36% in 2009



**Gambling is often intergenerational.
Māori interviewed stated that they had been taught to use
pokie machines by older members of their whānau. ⁶**

Maori Women and gambling

A study by Morrison ⁸ on Māori women and gambling reported that many participants were exposed to gambling as children either through card games at their homes or on the marae and often actively participated in games. This early exposure probably may have normalized gambling at an age when the participants were dependent on their whānau for food, protection, shelter, and physical care as well as for their social learning.

Morrison reports concern over the increase in Māori women's gambling since the introduction of casinos and pokie machines. She suggests that they are have four times higher risk for prevalence and problem gambling than non Māori women, and are likely to spend six times more per annum on gambling than non-Māori women.

She suggests that the positive aspects of marae based gambling for Māori women were the building of social support systems, the friendships, sharing of resources and the feeling of a safe environment, and a knowledge that gambling was for collective causes rather than personal gain.

Gambling also allowed women access to glamour and the ability to 'live life on the other side of the fence', and pubs became more female friendly allowing positive social interaction.

The negative consequence of their gambling are identified as loss of relationships, mistrust and isolation from whānau, selling personal assets to meet gambling debts.

It is suggested that women gamble as an escape, particularly from depression and that the increasing

number of Māori women with gambling problems maybe an indication of undiagnosed depression. Anxiety and stress have been identified as a major public health issue for Māori women of all ages. ⁵

2006/7 Gaming and Betting Survey ⁹

- 86% Maori participated in gaming over the 12 months
- 29% were on non casino pokies
- 58% spent an hour or more when playing the pokies
- Maori spent more on average than other demographic groups \$644
- Spending by Maori increased by 2/3 between 200 and 2005
- Maori spent on average \$399 in the casino
- 3/4 believe they break even when playing the pokies

Other statistics

Causal links found between alcohol, gambling related harm, mental ill health and criminal offending.

A study of male prisoners in New Zealand prison found that a significant number of participants identified as Māori. 10% of participants stated gambling was a major factor that has led to their imprisonment. One third were assessed as having experienced significant gambling problems in their life. ¹⁰

It was suggested that as gambling occurs significantly in New Zealand prisons some inmates would develop problems while inside and then continue on release.

Counselling – Treatment considerations

- Treaty of Waitangi
- Cultural heritage and identity considerations
- Whānau involvement

References

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